

CHAPTER 8

Adrian and Elias Cole meet each week, at the same hour. Around them the hospital is in constant motion day and night. Adrian finds he has to think, when writing up his notes, consciously, of the day and date, to count forwards from the moment of his arrival. Even the month he forgets. In England, the days would have begun, tentatively, to reach out with silver fingers in each direction. Here, the patterns of the sky elude him. *Red sky at night, shepherd's delight. Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning.* But what is one to make of a violet sunset? Or a white evening sun? The one thing of which he is certain is that it is getting hotter. Instead of becoming used to the heat, he is ever more tormented by it.

Adrian is still in the occasional habit of bringing something to each session. Once it was a novel, Huxley's *Antic Hay*, from the collection in his rooms. A newspaper bought from a roadside vendor, two thin leaves of dense, smudged text. A radio. He forgets the man's feelings about music. In time he removes it.

There are days when he must attend the Ministry to sort out his papers. The Labour Office is located on the sixth floor of a building without electricity and consequently no working lift. So far it has taken him several visits on different days to obtain the appropriate forms, establish who is the person who will process them. The man in question possesses a huge, shining bald head, is dressed, always, in a dark-blue safari-style suit and is never to be found in his office. Often he finds him sitting in the corridor talking with others of his kind, chewing matchsticks or cola nuts and watching people like Adrian come and go.

Thursday Adrian arrives back at the hospital exhausted and yet full of nervous energy. He sits down by the old man's bed. Elias Cole turns and watches him, but doesn't speak. Together they inhabit the amniotic stillness of the room, silent save for the old man's breathing, the muted sounds from outside.

His private clients in England, from the moment they left the room they ceased to exist. He did not allow their lives to spill into his.

Here it is different. From the moment he enters the old man's room it is his own, Adrian's, life outside that seems remote and unreal. His life in England even more so.

